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Chapter Nine: Zara and David IV

We traveled almost all over Europe to assist numerous military units from practically all NATO allied countries, but, surely due to how difficult it was, we always returned to France. I have really tons of anecdotes to tell from my time in the military. About my comrades, the

many battles, the not so serious adventures, our more peaceful moments... so much, but really so much. I shared too much, and I really mean too much, with Zara and David. Should I do it? Should I create a separate annex, or maybe a whole notebook just talking about what I experienced with them two and with everyone else? It's not relevant, really. It's not... it's not what I wanted to write about initially, nor is it why you probably started reading all this. Yes... I think that, if at some point I decide to tell all those stories, I will do it in a different work, separate from all these chapters that I burden you with. I almost feel like maybe I wouldn't have done so bad if I had dedicated myself to writing, almost.

Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, France, Spain, the Spain-Portugal border, Germany, Croatia... and, it may sound strange, but I don't remember exactly which ones right now, but I know I was deployed in more states. The combat was sustained, exhausting, and we hardly had any breaks. Our forces were really

committed to the cause, and that is why they did not hesitate to send us to the front as many times as necessary. We... yes, I think even I too, deep down. We wanted to save the world. We didn't grumble every time we boarded another plane to go kill strangers in a country we had never visited before, but we tried to take it in the best way we could and with the most energy we could muster. "We will take the opportunity to eat dishes that we haven't even seen before" when we knew that we were most likely going to eat the same MREs with a taste of shit. "The good part is that I always wanted to see a woman from that country in person, so I'll try getting a wife" even though we knew very well that our contact with the outside of the mobile base was almost always limited. "Haven't you seen photos of the landscapes? They're beautiful, I want a pic there" when I don't need to explain that tourism at that time was non-existent. And, despite everything, the memories we created are so, so many... That three or four books would not be enough to tell them

all! The times we ran from stupid dangers together with Zara and David after committing the stupidest rookie mistakes, and how ninety percent of the time our superiors didn't even find out about it! So many times I saw David fail at flirting with a native and so many times I saw Zaralyne sigh bitterly seeing mountains and forests from afar that she would have loved to visit, but she couldn't! And so many other times they saw me getting nervous when talking to a stranger, and sneaking away in civilian clothes during a day off to look for the best ice cream shop in town, and also angrily stabbing the tents where we slept if they were too damaged so that they couldn't refuse to change them! So much! So much, so...! So much so that I lived with those two... I can't tell you everything, reader.

I apologize for always going around in circles, I will continue with the matter that brings me to write this chapter, but I just wanted to tell you how much you are missing out on just because I cannot delay the progress of this story any further. This

piece of history, the one you will read below, is vital, I cannot avoid it or delay it anymore if I want to continue advancing towards the event in my life that I consider the most important: my encounter with Angelique.

You have so much to understand yet. And I have so much to tell... and it saddens me feeling like I'm running out of time.

Alright, here I go.

June, 2021

Amere's ferocity in their attacks was never underestimated nor doubted by anyone since the conflict began, but their power in political and often military decision-making across the continent was increasingly unexpected. So much so that everyone was left dumbfounded when all the high-ranking officials of the French Air Force were revealed to be apparently influential members of the so-called revolutionary organization. This led to

numerous desertions and internal conflict that soon led to France's total collapse, as one of the country's three most important forces turned against it, attacking the others without hesitation. Such influence...

Of course, there's where we ended up, trying to save the french's asses again, even if we were sure there was not much left for us to do, that our mission was nothing but keeping up some defensive areas until the whole population had already evacuated. And we dropped like flies. Could we say it was unfair? Our active numbers were reduced fight after fight as we ran through fire and dirt in order to protect people we... we never swore to protect. Why I, an Austrian, born in an Austrian family that had never set foot on another country before the war, had to give away my soul and body for the sake of some french I never saw and never would see again? I don't hold any animosity towards the french, but I also never cared enough to die for them. It was stupid, but... ah, that's at least the way I saw it.

It's quite ironic and incoherent, isn't it?

Nowdays, I risk my life day after day protecting a certain french girl from all and any harm.

With the national territory plagued with air bases of such different nature, attacks were usually lightning-fast and unpredictable, and entire sectors turned into Risk games from one moment to the next. I want to make myself clear: from one week to the next, the bases or areas located in a certain province were revealed as hostile to the current government, and our maps were dotted with green and red stains everywhere, like some sort of all-out war.

At this point, no one believed the country could be saved, not even the high ranks, I'm sure. But we were soldiers, we followed orders.

Yes, following orders, we ended up in Vieux Lyon. So rustic, so historic, so architecturally valuable... it was until our arrival. For us, it was just another battlefield that we could barely see standing. The sturdy solid stone buildings

fell like mountains of straw being blown by the wind when a cluster attack neutralized them. There was almost nothing left. The streets were collapsing with cracks, craters, and corpses, and the millennia-old alleys were covered in shrapnel and debris. Any historian would have bathed in their own tears at the state of such an important and previously well-preserved city; but I was not a historian, I was a soldier, and how pretty those floral arrangements looked on the walls of the corridors was completely irrelevant to me. I was too busy returning fire at a 240° angle to worry about the destruction taking place in Lyon.

The main objective was to try to prevent the total collapse of the province by capturing a strategically important core such as the three oldest neighborhoods of the city, but the rearming of the French Air Force surpassed us by far, also demonstrating the good logistics management that Amere possessed.

The terrorists had moved all the air defense systems from Orange-Caritat to

Mont Verdun in Lyon without us being able to gather any information about it. This allowed them to efficiently defend their advance on the southeast of the country, leaving us completely exposed as we were caught off guard by an oblique pincer attack that almost decimated us in a single assault. Those Mirages came and went over our heads with such persistence... so much, much persistence... We trembled every time the ground shook beneath our feet and the air seemed to shatter like glass when the deafening noise of their engines flooded our ears. I could never forget the cruelty with which it swept the area using those DEFA cannons whose noise when firing was forever etched in my eardrums. The walls, the asphalt, the trees, the people... everything crumbled into pieces when a burst hit it, leaving behind only charred fragments of what was once a complete existence.

From a platoon of ten people, only five of us were left, and neither David nor I were in command. Orders were given by a Frenchman who screamed like a madman

whenever he saw the planes. He was so afraid of the Mirages that he was capable of completely forgetting about the ground enemies, who were much more numerous. These close combat engagements near a more important Amere node led us to better understand the type of equipment they carried. It was a jumble of international pieces, yes, but not necessarily of poor quality. If we eliminated a complete six-man patrol, we could find two Kalashnikov rifles, an HK submachine gun, a Remington .22 carbine, a PKP, an ACR rifle, and pistols of such varied origins that they ranged from Colt to Bersa. This had its advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand, we knew that they were prone to running out of ammunition individually, but we were also unable to predict what we would encounter in the next engagement.

An old home with thick walls and sturdy foundations was our refuge for the moment while the three soldiers, whose language was still strange to me, debated what course of action to take. David and I

were leaning against opposite walls, in what appeared to be a living room, while the rest were in the center. The one in charge and another one were carrying those FAMAS Félin rifles, and the last one had a Hécate II on his back that clearly couldn't be used in our situation; his mission was reconnaissance and perimeter defense in case of enemy vehicles, but he was forced to join us after the enemy advance. They had helmets with dark visors, just like us, but we were carrying our AUG rifles as standard issue.

"Hey, David...".

The bombs were falling, I don't know if it was ten or a hundred meters away from our position, but the building was shaking in the same way.

"What?"

"Nothing yet?"

"Nothing..."

On his back, the red-haired man had a communication kit strapped to his waist with belts, which he had collected from the third casualty of his platoon: the radio operator, who was an Austrian.

"Is it broken?"

"Doesn't look like it, but I'm no technician. It only catches noise no matter where I turn the knob to."

"Does that mean all the other radios were drestroyed?"

"No idea. I know about this as much as you do."

"And the french...".

"Lieutenant just tried some channels and lost interest."

"So quickly."

"Yeah, and he told me to get rid of it, but I'm not doing that."

"There goes another punishment."

"I don't care. I'm not blindly following a frenchie that shouldn't be giving us orders

to begin with. I'll stick to it, I think it can prove being useful."

"Even if-"

There was a tremor, and dust fell from the ceiling of that dingy house, followed by the sound of an explosion somewhere unknown. The lieutenant looked up, momentarily losing interest in the map he had spread out on the dirty wooden table in an attempt to chart a new escape route. He glanced at both of us before pointing a finger at me, shouting something I couldn't make out, and then gesturing toward the only window that faced the street.

"Sure, don't you even think about risking one of yourt men..."

I muttered under my breath, checking my ammunition level by looking through the transparent polymer of my AUG's magazine, while crouching beside the opening and scanning the outside. I had a

little over half left.

Through the glass, I could see a street full of newly-formed cracks and craters. A heavy dust cloud covered the area, and on the square across the street, there were hardly any intact playgrounds left. There were some corpses or body parts belonging to both the French army and Amere, debris, fire, and overturned vehicles. However, nothing represented an immediate danger.

I looked at David and shook my head, and he signaled the lieutenant accordingly. Once we received confirmation, I looked outside again.

The smoke from the flames rose aggressively, obscuring the sun. It was an artificial cloudiness.

"They say something about going back to the city core."

"You know french?"

"A bit."

"Really?"

He had never mentioned it before, so it was a surprise.

"Yeah but not too much."

"Anyway, going back to the core now could be a bit hard."

"I don't want to follow this guy, Alez."

"Neither do I, but..."

The noise from powerful turbofan engines crossed over our heads, causing us to shrink in surprise and fear. Just after that, I saw the square across the street explode into a thousand pieces. The shockwave slammed the door violently against the frame and shattered the glass through which I was observing. The fragments fell on me, but they didn't even scratch me.

"Son of..."

Pure instinct made me take a few steps

back while removing the fragments from my body, and I felt a painful slap on my back.

"Ce n'est pas sûr! On va vers le nord! On s'en va avant la prochaine crise!"

The lieutenant was shouting at me so loudly that I could almost feel the droplets of saliva hitting my face through my visor. I looked to David for help, but he seemed as clueless as I was.

"I don't know what you're say-!"

Another explosion, but it was distant.

"L-look I have no idea what the fuck you're saying but run and we will run behind you!"

I tried to make myself understood as much as I could by gesturing with both hands, and it seemed that some of my charades made their way into that

frenchman's brain because after a few seconds he nodded in agreement and addressed his other two men. Meanwhile, David had taken my position at the window and was confidently looking outside.

"Are we going back north?"

"Is that what you got?"

"More or less."

"Shit..."

"Alright. Look, Alez. We are not going to get ourselves killed following this guy's whims."

"What do you suggest?"

"If things get to bad, we leave."

"Desertion?"

"They couldn't prove it was desertion if they can't even understand what we're saying."

"I'd preffer not to..."

"Do you want to die?"

"Not that, I'm just saying I don't like the

idea of leaving anyone behind if we can escape safely."

"That's beyond our reach, Alez."

David lowered his rifle and turned around to look at me.

"Lieutenant is stubborn, and the other two will follow him. Will they listen to two low-rank austrian dudes saying we should take a route different from what their direct superior is stating? Of course not."

The reddish cedar hairs that sprouted from his scalp and were barely visible through his translucent helmet visor seemed to shine amidst the dust, illuminated by the fire that seemed to burn with the sole intention of enhancing his natural color. The same thing happened with his eyebrows of the same tone, and with his white skin. David was a great soldier, but an even better and braver survivor. Perhaps even more than me.

"We might not have the defensive might but we have the radio, Alez. We just need to-"

And the entire building collapsed.

I remember feeling the pieces of concrete falling on me before feeling the explosion on the roof of the house. Almost like a timeless unfolding... as if I knew what that exactly means.

The part of the roof that collapsed did not fall directly on me, David, the lieutenant, or the other guy with the FAMAS, but the sniper was not as lucky as us.

"Alez! Stick to the wall!"

When I had shaken off all the particles in front of me to see clearly, I found that the center-right portion of the top of the building had suffered the largest collapse. And directly underneath, lay the guy who was carrying the Hecate, gruesomely

crushed from the head to the right thigh. It's not like all his guts had been scattered on the ground, but it was clear, due to the severity of the bleeding, especially in the head, that the guy was no longer alive. Or maybe none of us present knew enough about medicine or first aid to spend valuable time trying to save him. I can say that at least David and I had no idea about those things. Of course, nowadays and due to the circumstances and what I went through, I know a good deal about applying emergency treatments, but that's another topic that doesn't matter right now.

The lieutenant just crouched down to see the condition of the fatally wounded sniper and then insulted, or at least that's what I think, in a low voice. He looked at me helplessly and pointed to the rifle on the ground.

"Tu as de l'expérience?".

"I know how to use it, if that's what you mean."

It was a conversation between two crazy men who couldn't understand each other but somehow managed to interpret what the other wanted to convey. I secured my AUG on my back and picked up the heavy .50 caliber rifle from the ground, then grabbed as much ammunition as I could from the part of the corpse that the collapsed roof hadn't crushed.

Let's say... I had experience with precision rifles, yes, but not too much. Actually, it was just the times Zara had let me shoot with her SSG, along with the tips she left me to improve my aim and control. To make things worse, the SSG is a 7.62 mm caliber rifle, and I was pretty sure that the skill required to operate a .50 caliber one must be very, very different. But I didn't care.

"We'll not withstand another hit like that, we have to go."

It was David who approached the person

in charge. The lieutenant perhaps understood his intentions but not his words, nodded and gave a couple of quick orders.

We quickly evacuated the building and reevaluated our direction. Well, 'reevaluated' is a very elegant word. Actually, we just saw that to the north of the street where we came out there was nothing but fire and debris and the road was too complicated and risky.

Just then...

"That noise..."

The Mirages. Two fighters flew loudly over our heads, unleashing their automatic cannons on... the street parallel to ours. Were there allies there? No idea, but it was our signal to start running south. Running with two long guns on your back is not comfortable at all.

I don't think we even covered a hundred meters before the next discharge from the planes, which again targeted the street

next to us.

"Ne vous arrêtez pas!".

The impact of bullets on the ground and explosions from who knows where made it difficult to hear our own voices, so every order given was interpreted as just run and keep running.

We arrived at the corner, and it was necessary for us to communicate somehow to decide which direction to take. Since I was at the back, the other three turned to look at me so that none of us had any doubts about what to do next.

The lieutenant quickly assessed the situation, looked at the three forks in the street, raised his eyes to see where the terrifying Mirages were flying away to and then focused on a multi-story building on the corner to our left, reasoning that it was our best option.

"¡À l'hôtel! ¡Braviel-"

And I didn't understand anything else from the stream of words that he let out afterwards. My confusion must have been clearly reflected on my face.

It's curious that the lieutenant had learned my last name, but I hadn't learned his.

David approached me shouting.

"He said something about you breaking into the building and looking for a good sniping spot upstairs!"

And he never told us he knew French.

I ran as fast as my legs and the weight of the weapons allowed me to and crashed into the lock of the double entrance door of the hotel that the frenchman in charge had chosen as a shelter, although it was in vain, because it wasn't locked.

The others entered just behind me, and I complied with the order to go up to the upper floor immediately, without even taking the time to memorize the layout of

the hotel lobby. I only remember the counter, the chairs, and the walls in disarray, but not destroyed, as if the place had been evacuated suddenly on a normal workday.

I climbed those stairs alone, while I heard the lieutenant giving orders. I found myself in an ordinary hallway painted in a soft red that ran from north to south, some doors, of an elegant and sturdy appearance, were open and others closed, but all in good condition. I had to assume that the lieutenant wanted me to use the Hecate to check the situation beyond the limited visual field we had on the street, so I jogged to the room at the northeast end of the building and, kicking aside any remnants of furniture and luggage that its last guests may have left, made my way to the window of the room, perfectly located in the internal corner of the hotel. There was a neatly made double bed that I pushed against the wall of interest. Then I threw a wardrobe to the ground and did the same to position it against the window, and then my improvised sniper's nest was

ready.

I took a deep breath, sat down on the bed, unfolded the bipod of the Hecate and rested it on the wardrobe after taking off the AUG and leaving it aside. I adjusted the focus of the telescopic sight and only then exhaled to look calmly through the lens.

I couldn't tell whether the movie on the other side was a horror movie or a war movie.

Beyond the constant explosions and gunfire, I could see the enormous amount of collapsed buildings, multiple fires present throughout the city, even that skyscraper I saw fall as if a giant had swept its base with a single kick. And at that moment I wondered: 'How many people are dying in this city right now?' Military from all over Europe, terrorists... besides, no evacuation plan is so effective or complete. That never happens, they never manage to evacuate all the inhabitants of a city. Think about the homeless, the elderly who live alone or locked up, those who

were waiting for a next rescue convoy that never arrived...

I suddenly felt a deep bitterness.

"That is...".

Unidentified activity brought me back to reality.

An unarmored vehicle was slowly approaching from the street perpendicular to the one we arrived at the hotel. That is, they were coming straight towards us. Although it was still far away, about 500 meters, and they were moving really slowly. Just as I was about to leave to inform my teammates downstairs, I heard David's voice behind me.

"Alez, the french planned an escape route to the southwest, around the cathedral and-"

"I see activity to the north. It's a non-armored van with its glasses darkened, and I doubt any allied forces would-"

"I'll be right back."

And he ran down again. For my part, I focused on keeping the crosshairs of the scope on the windshield of the car that was now about 300 meters or less away from us.

David returned before I could hear the sound of his running footsteps.

"Fire!"

"What?"

"He says they can only be enemies! The order is to open fire!"

I did not share at all the criteria of that shitty frenchman. I spat to the side, adjusted the magnification, placed my finger on the trigger, and... thought about Zara.

Her way of pressing against the buttstock, the way she seemed to kill her prey with her gaze before the bullet... I tried to imitate her.

"200...".

"Are you gonna let them get closer?"

"Yes, 150..."

"I get it."

I wasn't looking at him, but I know David smiled. I heard him get down and let the van get a little closer.

When it was only 50 meters away...

Bang.

The front glass was pierced by a 12.7 millimeter thick piece of lead almost at the same time that I felt the equivalent of a horse's kick on my right shoulder.

The car stopped almost abruptly and a hooded man jumped out through the passenger door. Two others, with ski masks covering their heads, got out through the back door, but no one got out through the driver's door. They all carried M16 assault rifles, but they didn't look modern, so I suppose they were of the A1 or A2 type.

Ah... of course, by then it was so different from the first combat. No shame, no guilt, no fear, no remorse. It was just one more death of all the ones I had caused and still had to cause, nothing more than that.

It was hard to do suppressive fire with the beast of a weapon I was using, but I did what I could, especially when I heard the roar of cannons from the lower floor and saw both the hostile unknowns and the van receive a powerful discharge of 5.56 mm ammunition. And I didn't stop firing until the Hecate's magazine was empty. I don't remember it very well, since it was many years ago, but I think besides the guy whose head I annihilated with the first shot, I also wounded one more.

With the threat diminished, I allowed myself to release the tension accumulated in my arms and rested both my eyes and my shoulders and head.

My right shoulder was burning and made weird noises when I rotated it in circles to stretch the muscle.

I looked at the smoking shells on the ground and then scanned the room. The word 'confusion' would define it very well. The wardrobe's drawers were already open before I flipped it. There were numerous scattered clothes and open luggage backpacks whose owners, I assume, didn't have enough time to carry everything.

"Alez! Get down here! The radio catched a signal!"

David was yelling from the lower floor. The radio thing was a surprise, yes, but what came next was worse. I reloaded the Hecate lazily, and I stood up with the full intention of putting both rifles back on my shoulders.

Then, in the same way that Nale quickly turns to see his food plate when he hears the food falling on it, the roar of the engines made me turn to the window once again.

I don't know if there were two or three Mirage. They were flying low, very low,

and the dull green and brown enamel of their fuselage was easily distinguishable to me. They were coming straight towards us at an angle of about 30° from the northeast. When my body decided to react and jump out of the window, the entire building began to collapse on me accompanied by the deafening and infernal sound of bullets bursting through concrete.

I didn't have time to grab the Hecate or the AUG. A piece of roof - or maybe wall - fell right next to me, on the bed, and another one broke the floor on my other side, barely grazing my helmet. I let out a dry moan purely from the scare and turned around to run. I didn't even stop to try to understand what David and the others were shouting, I just devoted 100% of my neuronal capacity to focusing on the window in front of me.

I jumped out.

Free falling from high places is curious. One feels that it only lasts a fraction of a second and, at the same time, it seems to feel eternal.

I bounced violently against the asphalt after a four-meter flight, awkwardly rotating and feeling my muscles doing what they could to cushion each impact.

Once the momentum had done its job, I did my best to ignore the pain and quickly got up, running towards the hotel that was still trembling; I could see parts of its complex structure falling apart block by block.

"David... David! David!!"

I wanted to sprint forward but a sharp pain in my right thigh prevented me from doing so. I looked down, but there was no blood on my uniform, so it could only be something broken or similar.

I resumed my advance towards the hotel and, dragging my right leg, I shouted my companion's name with a force that made my throat scratch.

"David! Speak! Can you get out?! Whe-?!".

"I-I'm fine! I'm fine... I think..."

Upon hearing the pained voice, I breathed a sigh of relief and slowed down, searching with my eyes among the debris.

"Okay... where are you?"

"Wait, wait. Just give me a..."

And, accompanied by a groan of pain, an entire wall met the ground, followed by the portion of the roof that it held up. And on the other side, I could see David standing, without his helmet and with a red stain decorating his left profile. His AUG hung over his abdomen, and he had a lot of dirt on him, besides... the whole area surrounding his right hip was covered in opaque red.

"Ah... haha- fuck, man... w-walking it's painful... and breathing too."

"Holy... David we have to evacuate right now!".

"O-oh, yeah, I had just told you..."

The pain of the red-haired man escaped to the outside through his facial expressions as he emerged from the rubble, taking off the radio he still had on his back.

"Where are the french?"

"Ugh... I don't know. Maybe they were crushed, or they were lucky to crawl outside of the hotel."

"Outside?"

"Yeah."

David sat down on the street and started tinkering with something on the radio. I looked behind him, but there was no entrance to what was once a hotel that anyone could use to enter or exit. Then I thought that if they could escape, the french must have fled inside; to some internal courtyard or to the other side of the block.

"You lost your gun."

"Eh? Oh, yeah... I wasn't quick enough to pick it up."

"How bad, we're running out of firepower."

"I still have my handgun."

"You know what I meant."

Demodulation of an unknown signal by the radio that I thought was dead made the speaker vibrate and white noise could be heard.

"See? That's a positive signal."

I crouched down next to my partner, but he grabbed the microphone of the radio and sent the first message before I could speak.

"Cirros to Nimbus. Cirros to Nimbus."

There was silence for a few seconds,

during which I took the opportunity to verify the low risk of our situation. On the northern street, there was only that van riddled with bullets next to the three corpses from earlier. To the west, the asphalt had been torn up by the planes' fire, and just like to the south, the rubble from the buildings made it too complicated to advance, especially considering that we were both injured. The only clear path that would take us in the direction we wanted to go was to the west.

"Continue to Nimbus."

"They replied!"

"Critical situation. Only two operators left and we both are wounded. We need a MEDEVAC."

There was silence again. I looked at David, the guy was very focused, with all his senses dedicated exclusively to not allowing the communication with the main mobile post to be lost. He turned the tuning knob one or two degrees to one

side or the other every time the white noise got too loud.

Despite the distance, the sound of gunfire, explosions, and Mirages engines could still be heard.

"Could you determine your position, Cirrus?"

David glanced slightly at the pile of bricks that used to be a hotel and then lost himself in some uncertain point on the pavement.

"Less than 200 meters over the river. Not too far from the cathedral, I think."

"Roger. A MEDEVAC is imposible, head west around the river, there's an advanced outpost 900 meters after the cathedral."

"Roger."

He left the small microphone of the radio in its place and then painfully carried

it on his back. I should have taken that radio. Yes, I should have...

He tried to get up and I hurried to take him carefully by the arm to help him. Like a good companion... no, I wasn't a good companion. I was surviving. Yes, I sought survival by all means possible. I only helped David then and protected him because it was what gave me the most chances of survival. I used him, I truly took David and gave him a use as if he were a tool. Was it right? Was it wrong? Is there a moral compass that can be considered valid in a situation like the one we were living? I didn't think about that as I carried David on my shoulder, nor as I took those short steps to get used to the pain.

"Cathedral...?"

"Yes."

David's voice was hoarse.

"Look at your left, and... ah, well,

behind all that debris there should be the Vieux-Lyon cathedral. We should-".

"Yeah, I can see it."

At least the top of its tall towers was easily visible. Those ancient finishes and details that didn't inspire any peace in me almost completely diverted my attention from the black clouds and the continuous threads of light that could be seen crossing the sky in search of some target beyond my visual reach to destroy.

"We'll walk this street past all that debris until we can reach the river and follow it until... until we reach that defensive outpost Nimbus mentioned."

"Will you be able to walk all the way?"

"Yeah... yeah I think I will. In any case, you'll only need to carry the weight of the radio, my gun, myself and all of my equipement. It's not that much, is it?"

That half-smile of implication was not so effective. I didn't have the energy to try to

follow his way of easing the worst moments.

In that moment I...

"Ah... you know... I don't like my job, Alez."

. . .

I've gone on for too long. I'm finishing up this notebook and there's still so much to tell. Yes, maybe I rambled on here and there... ah, what a mess. My apologies for cutting this memoir in half, but I'll be returning to it very soon, and I'll make sure to attach those next pages to this same notebook in some way. Although, that doesn't interest you, reader. In fact, probably none of this interests you unless I write something like 'we have our food reserves in the basement' or 'we keep the ammunition in the room under the stairs'. That will completely depend on who finds these writings, I suppose.

I hope it's at least someone who can read

English.

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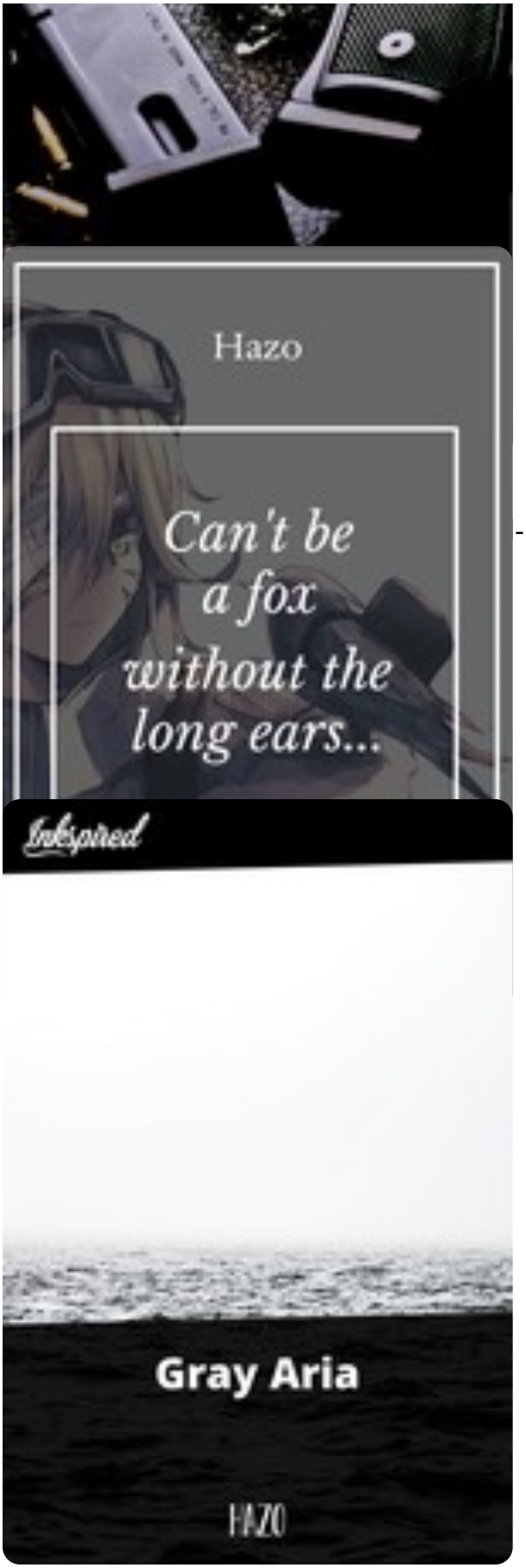

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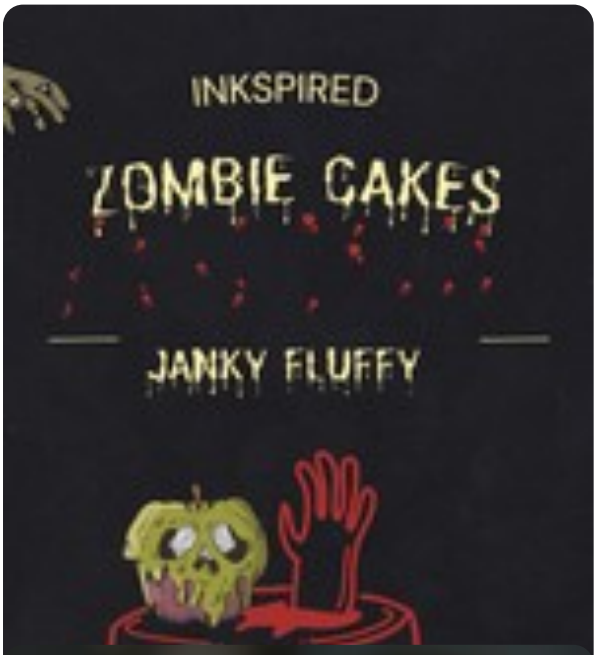

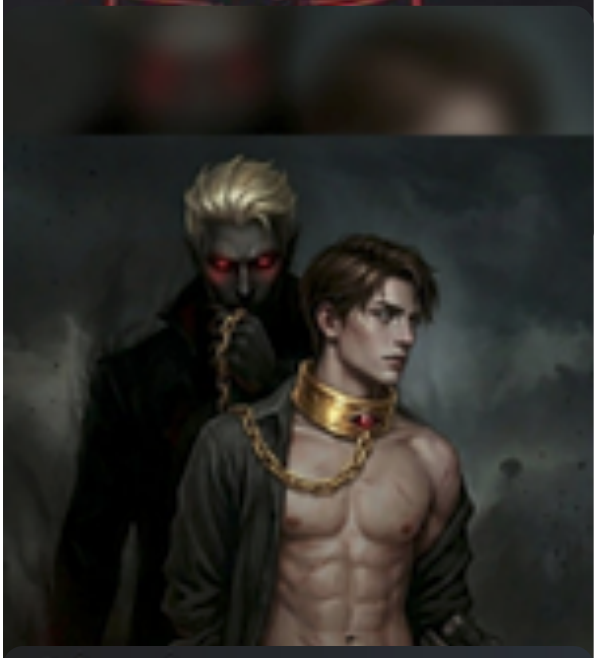

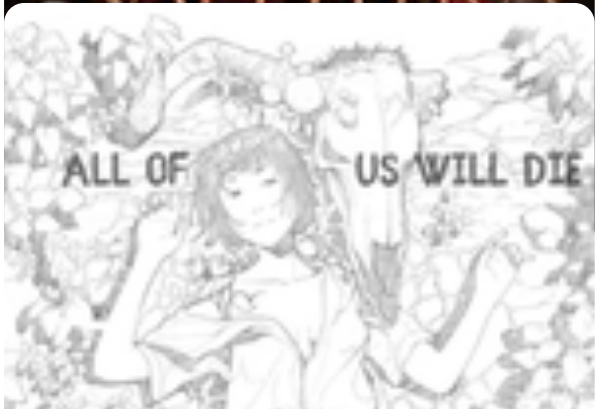

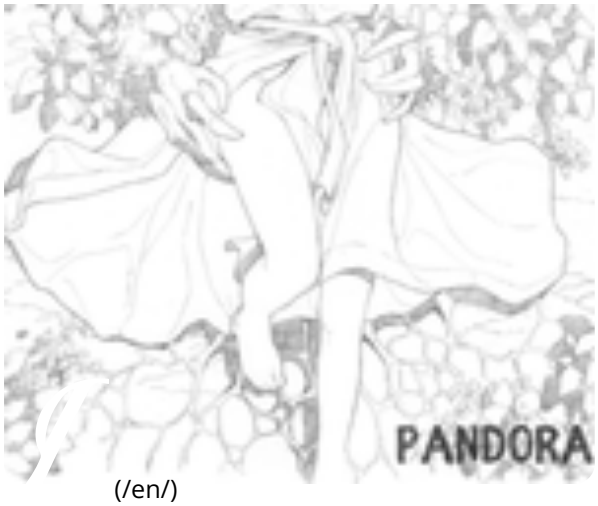

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